



**File Code:** 1950

**Date:** February 11, 2014

Dear Reader:

This letter is to inform you that the Environmental Assessment for the Rocket Vegetation Management Project has been completed and the project is now subject to a 45-day objection period. A draft Decision Notice, which accompanies the EA, describes the proposed decision to select Alternative 4 and reasons for the decision. Both documents are available on the Deschutes National Forest project website at [http://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa\\_project\\_exp.php?project=38282](http://data.ecosystem-management.org/nepaweb/nepa_project_exp.php?project=38282). Hardcopies can be requested by calling Beth Peer at 541-383-4769 or visiting the Deschutes National Forest headquarters office at the address on the letterhead. The EA describes the environmental effects of four different vegetation management scenarios, including No Action.

The Rocket project area, 22,682 acres, is located about one mile south of the urban growth boundary of Bend, Oregon. Planning began in 2012 for this project area, which is included in the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project. Some of the project area overlaps the Newberry National Volcanic Monument; the remainder is within General Forest, Scenic Views, Deer Habitat, and Old Growth Management allocations.

Vegetation management in the Rocket project will increase forest resilience to disturbance, improve deer habitat conditions, and produce wood products. In most of the area, fire exclusion has created overly dense stands and fuel conditions that can result in serious mortality from insects or hazardous fire behavior. Alternative 4 would authorize thinning and other harvest on about 9,938 acres. Thinning would increase growth and vigor of trees, and increase resilience to insects, disease, and wildfire. Reducing risk of insects and fire hazard would allow the forest to develop toward late and old structure, offering a better chance to reach the historic range of variability over time. Thinning is usually followed by natural fuels reduction. Natural fuels reduction would take place on nearly 7,871 acres through mechanical shrub treatments (mowing) and prescribed underburning. Mistletoe treatment and restoration of ponderosa pine where lodgepole and white fir have grown in are additional prescriptions in Alternative 4. Eleven small openings would be created with the intent of beginning shrub and ponderosa pine regeneration that will provide deer hiding cover or to treat pockets of heavy mistletoe infection. Two small aspen stands will be enhanced totaling about 5 acres. This project will provide approximately 20 million board feet of timber and other wood products and create or maintain around 320 wood products industry jobs.

Connected actions include maintenance of project area roads, temporary road development, road closures, and removal/restoration of user-created OHV trails. Resource protection measures are also included in the project design that would reduce or eliminate unwanted effects to soil, protect visual quality, and minimize disturbance to wildlife.

In order to implement Alternative 4, four non-significant Forest Plan amendments would be required. Within the Scenic Views management area (along Highway 46 and Skyliner's Road 4601), standards and guidelines will be amended to allow visible effects of underburning for approximately five years and to allow prescribed underburning on areas larger than five acres. These amendments would allow fuels objectives to be met in these corridors which are important transportation routes allowing safe ingress/egress for the public as well as firefighters. An amendment to the Eastside Screens would allow thinning within Late and Old (LOS) stages that are below the historic range of variability. Also, within Deer Habitat, an amendment would allow thinning to occur within thermal cover which is below levels identified in the Deschutes Forest Plan.



## Administrative Review

The Rocket project is now subject to the pre-decisional administrative review process pursuant to 36 CFR 218 subparts A and B (aka the objection process).

During the objection period, only those individuals or organizations that submitted specific written comments during a designated opportunity for public participation (such as scoping or the 45-day public comment period) may object (36 CFR 218.5). Objections must meet the requirements of 36 CFR 218.8(d); incorporation of documents by reference is permitted only as provided for at 36 CFR 218.8(b).

Objections may be mailed to: Regional Forester, Objection Reviewing Officer, Pacific Northwest Region, USDA Forest Service, Attn. 1570 Appeals and Objections, PO Box 3623, Portland, OR 97208-3623.

Objections delivered by mail must be received before the close of the fifth business day after the objection filing period. For emailed objections, please email to: [objections-pnw-regional-office@fs.fed.us](mailto:objections-pnw-regional-office@fs.fed.us). Please put OBJECTION and the project name in the subject line. Electronic objections must be submitted as part of an actual e-mail message, or as an attachment in Microsoft Word (.doc), rich text format (.rtf), or portable document format (.pdf) only. For electronically mailed objections, the sender should normally receive an automated electronic acknowledgement from the agency as confirmation of receipt. If the sender does not receive an automated acknowledgement of the receipt of the objection, it is the sender's responsibility to ensure timely receipt by other means.

If you chose to hand deliver your objection deliver it to the Pacific Northwest Regional Office, 1220 SW 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, Portland, OR, 97204. Hand deliveries can occur between 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM, Monday through Friday except legal holidays. Objections may also be faxed to: Regional Forester, Attn: 1570 Objections at (503)-808-2339. Objections must be postmarked or received by the Reviewing Officer, Regional Forester, within 45 days from the date of publication of notice of the objection in *The Bulletin*, Bend, OR. The publication date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an objection. Those wishing to file an objection should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

Issues raised in objections must be based on previously submitted specific written comments regarding the proposed project or activity and attributed to the objector, unless the issue is based on new information that arose after the opportunities for comment. The burden is on the objector to demonstrate compliance with this requirement for objection issues.

An objection must include a description of those aspects of the proposed project addressed by the objection, including specific issues related to the proposed project; if applicable, how the objector believes the environmental analysis or draft decision specifically violates law, regulation, or policy; suggested remedies that would resolve the objection; supporting reasons for the reviewing officer to consider; and a statement that demonstrates the connection between prior specific written comments on the particular proposed project or activity and the content of the objection, unless the objection concerns an issue that arose after the designated opportunities for comment.

For additional information: Beth Peer, Project Leader, phone (541) 383-4769, email [bpeer@fs.fed.us](mailto:bpeer@fs.fed.us).

Sincerely,

/s/ Kevin W. Larkin  
KEVIN W. LARKIN  
District Ranger